



National Transportation Safety Board

The Chairman's Corner

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Friday, February 16, 2007

NTSB Meets to Discuss Two Helicopter Accidents

In a report adopted at a public Board meeting on February 13, the National Transportation Safety Board determined that the probable cause of a fatal crash of an air tour helicopter in Hawaii was "the pilot's decision to continue flight into an area of turbulent, reduced visibility weather conditions, which resulted in the pilot's spatial disorientation and loss of control of the helicopter."

The accident occurred on September 24, 2004, when the Bell 206B helicopter, operated by Bali Hai Helicopter Tours, Inc., conducting an air tour flight on the island of Kauai, encountered adverse weather conditions and crashed into mountainous terrain. The pilot and all four passengers were killed in the crash.

"The air tour industry in Hawaii serves hundreds of thousands of paying passengers each year and the public deserves an appropriate level of safety when they embark on an air tour," said NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker. "It is my fervent hope that the FAA will move quickly on our recommendations."

The Board's report examined local weather training for newly hired Hawaii air tour pilots, air tour operational practices, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) surveillance of air tour operators, and flight tracking and on-board weather technology for Hawaii air tour aircraft.

In a second item at the Board meeting, the NTSB determined that the probable cause of the fatal crash of an air tour helicopter in Hawaii "was the pilot's decision to continue flight into adverse weather conditions, which resulted in a loss of control due to an encounter with a microburst."

Contributing to the accident, the Board said, was inadequate Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) surveillance of compliance with Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) 71 operating restrictions. Contributing to the loss of life in the accident was the lack of helicopter flotation equipment.

"This flight into dangerous weather conditions had tragic consequences," said NTSB Chairman Mark V. Rosenker, "but lives might have been spared if the helicopter had flotation equipment. I am disappointed that the rulemaking process once again has moved so slowly and that the final result still leaves open a real safety gap."

The Board recommended that FAA require that "all helicopters used in commercial air tour operations over water, regardless of the amount of time over water, be amphibious or equipped with fixed or inflatable floats."

The Board also recommended that the FAA evaluate the design, maintenance, and in-service handling to determine why some chambers of a PFD fail to inflate.



Comm Center Celebrates 10th Anniversary



The NTSB activated the Communications Center ten years ago on February 3, 1997. The next week, the Comm Center had its first launch when OHS sent a team to Slinger, Wisconsin. Hundreds of launches later, it has operated continuously as an agency-wide communication and information management system resource for the NTSB. The capability provides round-the-clock communications for NTSB, Go-Teams, accident information collection and notification services, and accident investigation status reporting. The Center also assists in shifting many administrative and information processing requirements from accident investigators to NTSB support staff. Congratulations on this tenth anniversary!

President Bush Signs Resolution for Additional Funds

The President signed H.J. Resolution 20 on February 15, 2007. In the legislation were additional funds for the NTSB. Because the Board had been flatlined in FY2006 during the continuing resolution, without the additional monies the Board had to impose a hiring freeze. These funds allow us to maintain current staffing levels, and cancel the hiring freeze.

Board Members Visit Marine Equipment Servicing Company

On February 1, Members Kitty Higgins and Steve Chealander visited The Vane Brothers Company in Baltimore, a major east coast facility that services marine safety equipment and provides tug and barge services to the marine industry. Mr. Frank Hornig, General Manager, arranged the visit, which was also attended by representatives of the United States Marine Safety Association and NTSB staff. Vane Brothers demonstrated how life rafts are serviced, and what the various Coast Guard requirements are for safety equipment aboard U.S. vessels. The demonstration included the launch from a tugboat and automatic inflation of a life raft. The group toured the operations center for the company, a state-of-the-art control center, which continuously monitors the location and other information for all Vane Brothers tugs and barges throughout the eastern seaboard and provides oversight and direction for all company operations. The visit also included a presentation of the company's plans for upgrading their petroleum transportation fleet to comply with the Oil Pollution Act well in advance of the 2015 mandated deadline.



Members Chealander and Higgins

Member Hersman Visits Chicago



Member Hersman addressed about 30 members of the Chicago Yachting Association on January 25 at the Burnham Park Yacht Club in downtown Chicago. The Chicago Yachting Association is composed of representatives from a number of yacht clubs in Illinois. Member Hersman talked to them about boating safety and about marine accident investigations, in particular the *Ethan Allen* accident. She was assisted by Bill Gossard. While in Chicago, Member Hersman also visited United Airlines headquarters, accompanied by Pam Sullivan and Jim Silliman, as well as the air traffic control tower at O'Hare. A highlight of the trip was the opportunity to enjoy lunch with the staff in the regional office in West Chicago (see photo).

Office of Marine Safety Addresses Small Passenger Vessel Association

Captain Morgan Turrell of the Office of Marine Safety addressed the Passenger Vessel Association (PVA) at its annual convention in Charleston, SC, on February 4th. The presentation was an introduction to potential party members about the NTSB marine investigation process, rules, and procedures in the event of a major marine casualty. During a discussion of an accident that is currently being investigated, a PVA member gave positive feedback to the audience about his experience with NTSB investigators. In other sessions, PVA members met to consider the impact of NTSB recommendations from other accidents, particularly the new passenger weight criteria to address stability concerns, and the emerging medical standards for mariners. With over 500 members, PVA represents a wide spectrum of the national maritime industry.

Chairman Rosenker Testifies Before Congress

On Tuesday, February 13, Chairman Mark V. Rosenker asked Congress to give the Federal Railroad Administration the statutory authority to revise hours of service rules for railroad workers, noting that current rules are not based on science related to fatigue.

Testifying before the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials of the House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Chairman Rosenker said that over the past 23 years the NTSB has investigated 16 major railroad accidents in which it established that the probable cause was crewmember fatigue.

Fatigue related railroad accidents continue to occur, the latest of which documented by the NTSB was in Macdona, Texas in 2004. "The FRA needs authority to regulate crewmember work scheduling practices and work limits," Chairman Rosenker said. "The Safety Board continues to support the need for change that would provide the FRA the authority."

NTSB Acquisition Year in Review...

The Acquisition Division (AD-20) recently concluded its annual Year-In-Review and Customer Survey. The results are in!!

	FY-03	FY04	FY05	FY06
Overall Satisfaction	33%	84%	93%	90%
Actions Awarded	288	309	406	438
Dollars Awarded	\$6.9M	\$8.1M	\$10.4M	\$15.4M

The survey was conducted between November 16 and December 8, 2006. As with past years, the survey was very successful.... nearly 60% of those customers invited, responded. The above data provides a comparison of the four years of surveying acquisition customers.

In FY2006, Acquisition awarded over \$15 million in Contracts, Task Orders, Inter-Agency Agreements, and Simplified Acquisitions. Through competition and negotiation, Acquisition saved the NTSB over \$1.3 million that was re-allocated for other goods and services, such as computers and furniture.

Visit the Acquisition Intranet website at <http://inside/financmat/acquisition.htm> for additional information.